



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FEDERAL AUTHORITIES ARREST 14
IN MAIL FRAUD, DRUGS AND MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton, Special Agent in Charge Giovanni Gaudioso, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, El Paso, Inspector in Charge Oscar Villanueva, United States Postal Inspection Service, Fort Worth Division, Special Agent in Charge Ralph Diaz, Federal Bureau of Investigation, El Paso announced today the arrest of 14 individuals charged in a mail fraud scheme executed to facilitate a drug trafficking and money laundering operation.

“Drug smugglers are constantly looking for new resources to help them conceal their identity and avoid detection by law enforcement. Today’s indictment and arrests reflects this office's commitment to vigorously prosecute those who profit by using legitimate businesses to help drug dealers sell poison in our communities,” stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton.

Those arrested and charged include:

63-year-old Maria Elena Alderete, a manager of T.I. Auto Licensing (TI) in El Paso and a sworn Deputy Tax Assessor Collector for El Paso County; TI employees 32-year-old Javier Alderete, 24-year-old Vilma Guzman, 27-year-old Gilbert Garcia and 33-year-old Olga Cereceres;

40-year-old Santos Perez, owner of Perez Bookkeeping Service (PBS) in El Paso; Perez’ son and daughter, 20-year-old Adrian Perez and 21-year-old Amy Pearl Perez (aka Amy Pearl Palacios); PBS employee 36-year-old Norma Monje of El Paso;

49-year-old Ana Maria Perches, owner of Perches Bookkeeping (PB) in El Paso; PB employee 63-year-old Jose Perches;

59-year-old Rebecca Garcia Martinez, owner of Twin City Insurance in El Paso;

62-year-old Elizabeth Smotherman (aka Elizabeth Tanner and Elizabeth Smith), owner of Twin Worlds Insurance in El Paso; and,

33-year-old Joel Olague of El Paso.

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The defendants were charged in an eight-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in El Paso on March 24, 2004, and unsealed yesterday. They are all charged with one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud, three counts of conspiracy to import a controlled substance and three counts of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute a controlled substance. Maria Alderete is also charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering.

The indictment alleges that between January 2000 and March 24, 2004, the defendants conspired together to defraud the El Paso County Tax Assessor Collector (EPCTAC), the Texas Department of Transportation and the government. The indictment states that the all of the defendants—except Martinez, Smotherman and Olague—either issued, or requested the issuance of, vehicle registration stickers, Texas license plates and temporary permits based on fraudulent information and supporting documentation (vehicle identification certificates, insurance cards, drivers license photocopies and title certificates). The indictment further alleges that the defendants knew beforehand that the fraudulently generated items would be used on vehicles to transport illegal drugs from Mexico to Texas through ports of entry in El Paso. In addition, the indictment alleges that Maria Alderete, Vilma Guzman, Javier Alderete, Gilbert Garcia and Olga Cereceres accepted unauthorized fees, over and above the fees required by the EPCTAC, in exchange for providing the fraudulent licensing documentation. Defendants Martinez and Smotherman are alleged to have provided insurance cards; defendant Olague, provided actual Texas vehicle identification certificates form VI30 “green sheets,” to facilitate the illegal operation. Finally, the indictment alleges that from August 2002 through March 25, 2003, Maria Alderete used TI bank accounts to launder approximately \$82,000 in purported drug proceeds.

“The investigation not only uncovered a significant abuse of the public trust, but also identified a vulnerability that could possibly be used to threaten our homeland security,” said Special Agent in Charge Giovanni Gaudioso, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, El Paso.

During the course of this scheme, authorities seized over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana, more than ten kilos of cocaine and over 500 grams of methamphetamine from vehicles registered by the defendants.

“As long as there are individuals who use the U.S. Mail to defraud state and municipal agencies, as well as the public, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service will vigorously investigate and bring to justice those who commit such crimes,” stated Oscar Villanueva, Inspector in Charge of the Fort Worth Division.

Upon conviction of all charges, the defendants face between 10 years and life in federal prison.

This Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) case is being investigated by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Office of Investigations, United States Postal Inspection Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Texas Department of Public Safety and El Paso Police Department. The United States Marshals Service, El Paso County Sheriff's Office, Texas Department of Transportation and the El Paso County Tax Assessor Collector's office provided assistance in the investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Greg McDonald and Jose Luis Acosta are prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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